

# Townsville South State School **PROCEDURES for RECEIVING COMPLAINTS**

## **School Complaints Management Procedure**

Complaints come to principals and other school staff in many forms. Complaints can be from parents/carers, community, staff or students.

This document outlines the procedures undertaken at this school to manage complaints. Complaints management at this school is also underpinned by part 3, section 22 of the *Education (General-Provisions) Act 1989*, Education Queensland's Complaints Management Policy contained in the Department of Education Manual and Making a Complaint web text located on the department's website.

All complaints are handled in a positive and open way.

## **Documentation**

The school documents all complaints.

Complaints are recorded and reported to the principal as soon as practicable after receiving the complaint.

Complaints can be made directly to the Principal.

The record of the complaint:

- Uses objective language clearly stating the facts
- Contains information in chronological order as practically possible
- Uses quotation marks, where appropriate and necessary
- Is neatly and legibly written in biro/pen or in print in clear unambiguous language
- Includes, where necessary, initialled and dated corrections
- Includes signature, designation of the author, and time and date of the incident/complaint

If it is not resolved at the first point of contact, the complaint is acknowledged within five (5) working days by telephone, in person, by email, or in writing.

Documents related to the complaint are kept and stored in accordance with the relevant departmental policies and schedules. Please refer to the Department of Education Manual - *CM 10: Records Management Schools and Non-School Offices*. This includes schedules governing the archiving and disposal of records:

- General Disposal and Retention Schedule
- Retention and Disposal Schedule for Records held in Central and District Offices
- Retention and Disposal Schedule for Records held in School.

## **2. Complaints Management Phases**

There are four key phases in handling a complaint, with the option of a fifth phase for review of a complaint outcome:

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| Phase 1. | Receiving and clarifying the complaint |
| Phase 2. | Deciding how to handle the complaint   |
| Phase 3. | Finding out about the complaint        |
| Phase 4. | Making a decision about the complaint  |
| Phase 5. | Review                                 |

### ***Phase 1 – Receiving and Clarifying the Complaint***

Any member of staff can receive a complaint.

All complaints are received in the following manner:

- Being respectful and helpful
- Giving the person your undivided attention
- Not being defensive, apportioning blame
- Remaining positive
- Not perceiving anger as a personal attack

When a staff member receives a verbal complaint they:

- Listen carefully to the issues being raised
- Summarise the issues to clarify and check that they understand what the complainant is telling you
- Empathise and acknowledge the complainant's feelings
- Find out what the complainant wants to happen as a result of the complaint
- Tell the complainant that they may use the support of a third party in progressing the complaint, if they feel this is needed
- Resolve the complaint if possible, or assure the complainant that an appropriate staff member will address their complaint
- Tell the complainant of what will happen with their complaint
- Thank them for their complaint

Complaints are sometimes made with the assistance of an advocate, interpreter or by a third party (as agreed between the complainant and the principal). In this case staff will receive and clarify a complaint from more than one person.

Many complaints are resolved at the first point of contact with information and/or an explanation, together with an apology and recognition of the effect the situation has had on the person. Some complainants may also want an undertaking that action will be taken to prevent the problem recurring. When the complaint is not resolved immediately the complaint is referred to the principal as soon as is practicable.

A member of staff who receives a verbal complaint that is not resolved informs the complainant of the further options of:

- Putting their complaint in writing; or
- Assisting the member of staff to record, in writing, the particulars of their complaint.

In general, if the complainant agrees to put the complaint in writing, the member of staff takes no further action unless or until a written complaint is received.

However, if the complaint relates to a report about harm (whether physical/emotional/ sexual) of a student under 18 years attending a State educational institution, or the matter relates to possible criminal activity, the matter is immediately reported to the principal or the principal's supervisor advising them of all the particulars known (in relation to sexual abuse, as prescribed in regulation 76AA of the Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2000). Refer to the Department of Education Manual, *HS-17 Student Protection Policy*, for detailed obligations of all Education Queensland employees.

Once the complainant indicates that they would like to register a formal complaint verbally, the member of staff makes a written outline of the issues concerned. The record is read to the complainant, with opportunity for appropriate amendments and the complainant is asked to sign, where possible, the written version of the complaint. The staff member also signs (indicating their personal designation, for example, "Year 7 Teacher, XYZ State School") and dates the complaint. No signature is required for verbal complaints taken over the phone, but the complainant is asked to provide verbal confirmation of the issues that have been recorded.

If a complainant refuses to sign or confirm a written recording of a verbal complaint, the staff member notes the refusal on the written complaint. The complainant is told that this refusal will be noted and that the process will be reliant on the staff member's interpretation and notes only. The complainant may not, at a later date, make another complaint based on a lack of satisfaction with this record of complaint.

### **Receiving a Written Complaint**

When a written complaint is received it is date-stamped and forwarded to the principal.

### **Receiving an Anonymous Complaint**

When an anonymous complaint is received the complainant is told of the possible limitations associated with the making of an anonymous complaint.

## **Phase 2 – Deciding How to Handle the Complaint**

When a staff member receives a complaint they:

- Begin the process of making an assessment about a complaint from the moment the complaint is received
- Make an assessment in the first instance about whether the issue can be dealt with as a concern or a complaint
- If they are not the principal, refer the complainant or the complaint to the principal for addressing.

The principal decides whether to:

- Take no further action
- Attempt to resolve the complaint through resolution strategies such as mediation
- Refer the complaint to the relevant internal or external agency if required
- Initiate an investigation of the complaint, within the school, if further information is required.

### **Co-ordination of complaints**

The principal has final responsibility for the management of all complaints that relate to school management issues under his/her jurisdiction. The complaint can be referred to another staff member in the school for action (for example, the deputy principal, registrar or nominated staff member).

If the complaint relates to departmental policy, or a departmental policy position, the complainant is advised to take their complaint to the relevant district or regional office. If the complaint is in relation to official misconduct, student protection, staff grievances or a perceived breach of privacy, the complaint is directed to the Workforce Standards and Performance Unit and the Legal Services Branch.

### **Record of Complaint**

The principal ensures that records are kept of a complaint and any referral of a complaint for either internal or external review.

## **Phase 3 – Finding Out About the Complaint**

The principal or delegate gathers all the necessary facts about the complaint while keeping in mind the principles of natural justice of all parties concerned.

The principal or delegate investigates complaints by:

- Collecting and analysing information relevant to the matter
- Working collaboratively with all people involved
- Finding the facts relating to the matter
- Identifying any contributing factors to the matter
- Consulting the relevant DOEM policy on issues that relate to the complaint
- Documenting the investigation report or outcome

## **Phase 4 – Making a Decision About the Complaint**

Based on the facts about the complaint gathered in Phase 3, the principal, or delegate makes a decision on the complaint.

### **Notifying the complainant of the decision**

Within 28 days of receipt of the complaint, the principal provides the complainant with either:

- A written response, including reasons for the decision or
- A written notification that their complaint has been referred to an internal or external agency.

## **Phase 5 Review Phase**

If the complainant is not satisfied with this response, they are encouraged to discuss it further with the school Principal and/or advised to contact the Principal's supervisor, the Executive Director, Schools at the district office. Further review of the decision is available from the Office of Education Queensland and the Queensland Ombudsman as described in *Making a Complaint*.